

## **Migration controls in Italy and Hungary: from conditionalized to domesticized humanitarianism at the EU borders**

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**Migration controls in Italy and Hungary:  
From Conditionalized to Domesticized Humanitarianism at the EU  
borders**

**Introduction**

This article analyses the migration control narrative in Italy and Hungary at the nexus of humanitarianism and securitisation. Noteworthy for our purposes is how the humanitarian discourse is undervalued as the EU border states emphasise either full securitisation or else securitisation as a condition for humanitarianism when it comes to border management and refugee protection measures. In effect, our goal is to trace, on the one hand, how politicians conceptualise humanitarianism for the *self* and for the extension of the self; and, on the other, how they conditionalize humanitarianism for the *other*. The term humanitarianism refers to those activities “intended to relieve suffering, stop preventable harm, save lives at risk, and improve the welfare of vulnerable populations” (Barnett 2013: 383). The humanitarian-securitisation nexus indicates a simultaneous mobilisation of humanitarian and securitisation discourses in which the humanitarian rhetoric can also be used to justify and legitimise the implementation of security measures (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Cuttitta 2018; Sciurba and Furri 2018). Reflecting on the institutional and discursive nexus of humanitarianism and securitization in effect to migration controls, our aim is also to contextualise political narratives of Europe and how politicians use them to affect the public. We elaborate on this nexus considering how it foregrounds human rights for the *self* but challenges humanitarianism as it undervalues human rights for the *other*.

To trace political communication over migration governance at the humanitarianism/securitization nexus, we offer a study on “old” and “new” EU member states which stand at sea and land borders. In Hungary for much longer, but in Italy much recently, conservative right politics have become dominant. In order to see how migration politics is framed for everyday consumption, we are referring to tropes emerging in major political speeches in Italy and Hungary. The Italian context takes the migrant as the subject of humanitarian discourse. However, in developing a strategy of border management, security objectives prevail as a condition of humanitarianism. We call this *conditionalised humanitarianism*. Looking at the context of Hungary, the self as the subject of humanitarianism is the Hungarian/European and the extension of the self is the Middle Eastern Christian. We refer to this as *domesticised humanitarianism*. The next section spells out the conceptual and methodological assumptions that underscore our assumptions.

### **Conceptualisation**

The primary aim of anti-immigrant political narratives is to construct certain “in- and out-group” identities by applying “strategies of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others” (Wodak 2009, p. 40). Thus, we approach narratives with an Althusserian focus, i.e., we explicate narratives as discourse that *interpellates* subjects by the transmission of messages, which the public can subsequently identify with. Henceforth, narratives construct knowledge in a way in which only certain interpretations and modes of reasoning are possible: they create a connotative chain by which members of the public come to identify with the content and the subject-positions that they transmit and aim to pursue (Weldes 1996). The discursive presentation of policy objectives as such both reflects and reproduces certain shared

beliefs and concepts salient to the public, and a shared identity that underpins these objectives (Hansen 2006, pp. 18-23).

While elites construct discourse, discourses also speak through us, through our human agency, and thereby privilege and shape certain ways of apprehending the world. A discursive frame then becomes a deeply structured symbolic apparatus that we use to make sense of the world (Korkut and Eslen-Ziya 2018). According to Mumby and Clair (1997, pp. 202), “this frame provides the fundamental categories in which thinking can take place. It establishes the limits of discussion and defines the range of problems that can be addressed”. There has been ample research in this regard in security studies (Balzacq 2005; Van Rythoven 2015) and what we earlier proposed as “discursive governance” in policy research (Korkut et al. 2015). In this sense, narratives relate to “patterns and commonalities of knowledge” (Wodak, 2008, p. 6), and gain an “increasingly conceptual nature” (Krzyżanowski, 2016). Narratives always unfold in a certain historical, social and political context, which inescapably determines their forthcoming comprehension and interpretation (van Dijk, 2008). Thus, embedding narratives in appropriate contexts, or “recontextualising” the conceptual frame in which they operate, is crucial so that narratives can take effect (Krzyżanowski, 2016 and 2019).

Following this interpretation, we will follow the transformation of the humanitarianism narrative facing securitization. We will demonstrate first how recontextualisation of humanitarianism for the self – but not the other – legitimises strategies of migration control and exclusion and second how reconceptualisation of human rights as the rights of citizens and of Christianity as a constituent of national/European identity abate humanitarianism and constrain its universal essence. Moreover, in showing how humanitarian rhetoric, albeit with an interpretation limited

to protect the self against the other, is used to justify and legitimize the implementation of security measures, we argue that humanitarianism and securitization do not necessarily represent two distinct logics. Instead, the analysis of narratives in this study highlights that securitization could be conceived as a condition for humanitarianism as they adopt a streamlined common logic (Little and Vaughan-Williams 2017; Stepka 2018; Watson 2011). The next section illustrates our methodology for studying Hungarian and Italian narratives to this extent.

### **Methodology:**

Western governments increasingly emphasise their responsibility to protect the human rights of their citizens as opposed to the human rights of non-citizens whom they also qualify to pose danger. This is how humanitarianism becomes prone to politicisation to accommodate securitisation demands. We follow this process via two methods of communication practices in two contexts. The Italian context illustrates communication with references to an institutionalised essence of migration controls while the Hungarian context appeals to narratives as its primary term of communication. In Italy narratives of humanitarianism and securitization have shaped the following discourses that refer to first the need to strengthen solidarity among EU Member States in tackling migration flows – through the establishment of a fair distribution of responsibilities between them – and second the necessity to establish cooperation with North African countries through bilateral agreements. The Hungarian government's narrative stated that migrants threaten the Hungarian and European citizens' cultural and socio-economic rights, and international protection can only be guaranteed in situ and for those similar to the Christian self. However, they both imply preventing arrivals to Europe at the first place.

We also explore communication styles and references that affect the formulation of the humanitarianism/securitisation nexus inasmuch as how this nexus undervalues human rights. On the one hand, the content of the bilateral agreements signed between Italy and North African countries shows the prevalence of domestic securitarian interests over human rights considerations (Paoletti 2012). In fact, since cooperation is established with countries where systematic violations of human rights are reported, an externalization strategy affects refugees' and asylum seekers' fundamental rights adversely (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016). Border externalization "attempt[s] to (or effectively) limit formal legal obligations, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum by preventing migrants from ever coming under the jurisdiction of destination states" (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016, pp. 197). On the other, in Hungarian narratives, we note a hierarchy of those who deserve rights and guaranteeing one's place in this hierarchy inasmuch as their identity is in confluence with the national characteristics that underpin host states. Thereafter, human right to protection against persecution can become symbolically attached to migrants' similarity to the self and docility for the established European order even if the self and the institutionalised order seek to keep the migrants at bay and away.

Over the next sections, we will depict conditionalised and domesticised humanitarianism looking at the Italian and Hungarian cases. Their discursive making rests on the circulation of certain tropes such as the 'defence of European civilisation', 'great wandering of people' and 'fair share of responsibilities'; border control, externalisation, and development aid practices as well as endorsing a moral duty narrative to protect the regular migrant or those that stay in situ. Given the curbs on regular migration as well as development policies geared to keep people away from European borders, however, this also shows how securitization condition

humanitarianism. To this extent, we reflect on Krzyżanowski's (2016 and 2019) discourse-conceptual analysis considering the intersection of constructions of the imagined and the real affecting who deserves humanitarianism and who should be securitised and kept well beyond the borders of the self. In this effort, politicians' recontextualization of the "crisis" that the *self* experiences at the face of increasing external migration, thereby, the arrival of the *other*, allows a de facto description of irregular arrivals as invasive and threatening Krzyżanowski, (2019, pp. 466). Similar to Krzyżanowski's (2019) analysis of Brexit debates amidst "the predominance of the past/present-to-future dimension of discourse which served as a tool in connecting the imaginary and the real", external migration narratives qualified by humanitarianism and securitization related political tropes, practices, and discourses as well as the construction of the self and the other within the realm of these debates bring forth references from the past and the future-to-be to eventually transforming both the self and the other. Pertinently, such "expected and imaginary crises" (Krzyżanowski 2019, 467) aim at burdening what is known with what can be unknown. Hence, our article explores the repercussions of macro political narratives facing the boundaries of the self and the other, and discuss what happens when meta-narratives of humanitarianism and securitization clash to either *conditionalize* or *domesticize* assistance to the other and legitimise various forms of regulation (Krzyżanowski 2016). In the conclusion part, we will come back how political communication styles operate to boost the relevance of humanitarianism/securitisation nexus to publics and re-visit their conceptualisation of through political discourse.

### **Italy: Conditionalised Humanitarianism**

Italy presents an institutionalised exclusionary regime sustained by an emphasis on externalisation by political actors despite changing governments. Two key features in the development of the Italian border management and migration control regime can be identified as follows: the adoption of the ‘hotspot approach’ and the security-driven externalisation of border controls. The hotspot approach has been launched shortly before the peak of the European migration crisis as part of the European Agenda on Migration in 2015. It aims at providing assistance to countries with high migratory pressure and coordinating the activities of EU and national authorities at the external borders of the EU. In practice, hotspots are facilities for initial reception, identification, registration and fingerprinting of migrants arriving in the EU by sea, and they have become crucial for the overall Italian asylum system in the areas of first reception and repatriation and for the relocation programme since 2015 (European Parliamentary Research Service 2018).

We focus on the process of externalisation of border controls, which refers to those actions aimed at preventing migrants, including asylum seekers, from entering the territories of destination countries (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016). Though the Italian externalisation strategy has been supported by narratives that are both humanitarian and security-oriented in nature, the security-oriented objective has prevailed also as a condition of humanitarianism. Through externalisation and admission procedures, decisions have become no longer confined to the actual physical border but involved the point of departure – or of transit – as well (Menjívar 2014). In a nutshell, the term externalisation refers to “a process that moves the migration control policies beyond the (European) external borders” (Biondi 2012, pp. 149; see also Guild and Bigo 2005).



As part of an externalisation strategy, the agreements signed by Italy with countries of origin and transit to prevent irregular immigration and to establish a procedure to enforce return have clearly served “as enabling instruments for the Italian push-back policy” (Andrade 2014: 52). As a legal expert has commented, the Italian approach to border management in the last few years can be defined as ‘schizophrenic’<sup>1</sup>. There have been times of restriction in access to the territory and times of opening concerning search and see rescue operations. The same definition might apply to the discourses geared for the public debate. As the analysis shows, there has been an alternation of narratives over humanitarianism and securitisation of border management and migration control with a constant emphasis on solidarity at the EU level and externalisation towards African countries.

Narratives of humanitarianism have been focusing on the commitment by the Italian government to save migrants’ lives and protect their human rights. However, the humanitarian discourse is strictly intertwined with that of securitisation, which stresses the need to fight against illegal immigration, smuggling of migrants, and terrorism. Indeed, humanitarianism and securitisation have often gone hand in hand. Crucial to the analysis of the ‘security-oriented and humanitarian nexus’ is the discourse developed around the Mare Nostrum operation, officially an humanitarian mission launched by the Italian government in 2013 to address the dramatic increase of migration flows in the Strait of Sicily<sup>2</sup>. In fact, “although the stress was mainly put on the humanitarian aim of saving lives at sea, Mare Nostrum was also presented [...]

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with a legal expert, 18 October 2018, Florence, Italy.

<sup>2</sup> Mare Nostrum was a military operation launched on 14th October 2013 and enhanced by a resolution of the Council of Ministers approved on the same day. It started on the 18th October 2013 and ended on 31st October 2014. The operation was as a response to the Lampedusa shipwreck of 3 October 2013, when 368 migrants died after their boat sank before reaching Italian shores.

as a security mission aiming at capturing smugglers” (Cuttitta 2014, pp. 27). As declared by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Emma Bonino (Italian Radicals)<sup>3</sup>,

in the Sahelian crossing, the mixture of real refugees and other types of more worrying people becomes [...] very evident. This is why Operation Mare Nostrum, which we hope will sooner or later also become a European operation, certainly has the merit of saving people [...] but also a possibility of filtering and controlling refugees who are ‘less refugees’<sup>4</sup>.

The security-oriented and humanitarian mix has also characterised the discourse over externalisation, which emphasised the need to establish cooperation with – and provide assistance to – North African countries. Decision-makers – from both the center-left and the center-right – have always considered the externalisation of border management and migration control as the winning strategy to curb migratory flows. In 2007, an agreement for the joint patrolling of the Libyan coast was presented as necessary to stop smugglers, and therefore to save human lives and disrupt criminal organisations. One year before, with regard to deaths at sea, the Ministry of the Interior Giuliano Amato (Independent)<sup>5</sup> had declared:

I would like it to be rationally perceived that these phenomena are inhuman and that we have a civil and moral obligation to intervene to put an end to them. To put an end to these phenomena means, however, to stop the flow of illegal immigration, because it is a flow organized by [...] criminal organizations that put migrants’ lives at risk, first in the desert and then in the crossing of the Mediterranean. I see patrolling activities to be carried out mainly near the Libyan coasts, to prevent [migrants] from entering the Mediterranean<sup>6</sup>.

In 2009, the Ministry of the Interior Roberto Maroni (Northern League)<sup>7</sup> declared that “since the agreement with Libya came into force, [thousands of people] have not left Libya. This is the most positive fact, I believe, because the [...] tragedy

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<sup>3</sup> Government led by Enrico Letta (grand coalition, 2013-2014)

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 12 December 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Government led by Romano Prodi (center-left, 2006-2008)

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 3 August 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Government led by Silvio Berlusconi (center-right, 2008-2011).

of so many deaths at sea has been avoided”<sup>8</sup>. When during the same year several push-back operations were conducted by the Italian authorities, the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi declared, “we must keep doors open to those who enter according to quotas and close it against mass migration [...]. Push-backs are important and necessary because they avoid tragedies at sea, they are an act of great humanity”<sup>9</sup>. These statements provide an example of a mix of security-oriented and humanitarian approaches in border management that focuses on the “humanitarian consequences of smuggling and trafficking activities” (Cuttitta 2014, pp. 25), notwithstanding the anti-humanitarian consequences of the restrictive control policies implemented.

In 2011, the then Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni (Northern League)<sup>10</sup> emphasised the necessity of intensifying the “diplomatic activity towards the countries of origin, primarily with Tunisia, [and] strengthening the relations with other countries, namely Egypt, Morocco and Algeria”<sup>11</sup>. With regard to Tunisia, the Minister argued that “cooperation in border surveillance at sea is absolutely important, together with that of repatriation, because it serves to prevent landings, which is always the best thing to do since it makes it possible to save human lives”<sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, one year later, during a parliamentary committee hearing, the Ministry of the Interior Anna Maria Cancellieri (Independent)<sup>13</sup> stressed that the government aim was to help North African countries to ‘work’ better on their territory:

government efforts to find effective means for combating illegal immigration continue. In this direction, [...] bilateral cooperation policy has been given new impetus and

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<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 23 September 2009.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Immigrati: Berlusconi, respingimenti sono atto di umanità’, 25 May 2009, available at [http://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/2009/05/25/Politica/IMMIGRATI-BERLUSCONI-RESPINGIMENTI-SONO-ATTO-DI-UMANITA\\_095029.php](http://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/2009/05/25/Politica/IMMIGRATI-BERLUSCONI-RESPINGIMENTI-SONO-ATTO-DI-UMANITA_095029.php)

<sup>10</sup> Government led by Silvio Berlusconi (center-right, 2008-2011).

<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 7 April 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 7 April 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Government led by Mario Monti (technocratic government, 2011 – 2013).

collaboration with North African countries, in particular Tunisia and Libya, has therefore been resumed. The need is to ensure greater efficiency in border control, combining it with respect for human rights [...]. [This strategy] of cooperation with the Libyan authorities in the field of migration is part of a context that favours [...] a preventive approach to the phenomenon with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Libyan police forces in the fight against criminal organisations and better management [...] of the migrant population”<sup>14</sup>.

In 2013, the Parliamentary Committee Responsible for Monitoring the Implementation of the Schengen Agreement stated in a report that “with a view to solidarity in the management of external borders, it is necessary and urgent for the European Union to act as a counterpart to bilateral agreements with [...] African countries, in order to govern migration flows and to facilitate return policy” (Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic 2013, pp. 20). As also stated in a 2016 Communication of the European Commission,

development and neighbourhood policy tools should reinforce local capacity-building, including border control, asylum, counter-smuggling and reintegration efforts. All actors – Member States, EU institutions and key third countries – need to work together in partnership to bring order into migratory flows. [In particular], positive and negative incentives should be integrated in the EU's development policy, rewarding those countries that fulfil their international obligation to readmit their own nationals, and those that cooperate in managing the flows of irregular migrants from third countries [...]. Equally, there must be consequences for those who do not cooperate on readmission and return<sup>15</sup>.

During the same year, in a letter to the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council – Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk

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<sup>14</sup> Hearing of the Minister of the Interior on Immigration Issues within the context of the Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, 16 May 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council and the European Investment Bank on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration (COM(2016) 385 final, Strasbourg, 7.6.2016, p. 2, 9).

respectively – the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party)<sup>16</sup> emphasised the importance of pursuing an externalization strategy:

the external dimension of migration policies is fundamental for the survival of Schengen and the principle of free movement. The management of migratory flows is no longer sustainable without a targeted and enhanced cooperation with third countries, both of origin and transit<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, in 2017, in a letter to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti (Democratic Party)<sup>18</sup>, remarked that in order to encourage a reduction in migratory flows,

the [...] Italian strategy [...] focuses [also] on supporting Libyan authorities responsible for border control and flow management. [This strategy] contributes to reducing the risk of accidents and shipwrecks, a risk that can only be eliminated by stopping departures<sup>19</sup>.

In the same letter, the Minister specifies that the activity of the Italian authorities is limited to training, equipment and logistical support of the Libyan Coast Guard, with the aim of preventing “life-threatening crossings and ensuring compliance with international reception standards in Libya”<sup>20</sup>. Few months before, in a speech to the Democratic Party Congress, the Minister had stated that “it is a moral duty to welcome those who flee war, those who flee famine, unaccompanied minors: we will always welcome them!”, but also added that “part of this game is played outside national borders, a large part of this problem is in Africa, and we must clearly tell Europe that Africa is the mirror of Europe”<sup>21</sup>. In June 2018, in his inaugural

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<sup>16</sup> Center-left Government, 2014 – 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, 15 April 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Government led by Paolo Gentiloni (center-left, 2016 – 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Letter to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 11 October 2017

<sup>20</sup> Letter to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 11 October 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Speech to the Democratic Party Congress, 15 March 2017.

speech to Parliament, the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (Independent)<sup>22</sup>, has stated that

[w]e defend and will defend immigrants who regularly arrive on our territory, work, fit into our communities, respecting the laws and, indeed, offering a contribution that we consider decisive to the development of the country. But to ensure the indispensable integration we must [...] fight with severe determination the most odious forms of exploitation related to trafficking in human beings, perpetrated by unscrupulous smugglers<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini (Northern League)<sup>24</sup> during a parliamentary speech insisted on the need to pursue an externalisation strategy: “[w]e are working with Libya [...] for the provision of means, [...] training, [and] economic support. [However], the problem is not limited to Libya; it is necessary to involve Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco”<sup>25</sup>.

Beyond the concurrent narratives and discourses on humanitarianism and securitisation, the strategy of externalisation of border controls, security objectives certainly outweigh humanitarian aims (Cuttrita 2014). The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Italy and Libya in 2011 emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in combating smuggling of migrants and terrorism. The same holds for the MoU signed between Italy and Sudan in 2016 and that signed again with Libya in 2017. This is all in line with a general orientation towards a more stringent regulation of the migration phenomenon to reduce the incidence of irregular immigration. More recently, a crucial actor in fuelling the securitisation of the migration phenomenon has been Matteo Salvini, who stressed the need to defend borders and to block departures from African shores.

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<sup>22</sup> Populist Government, 2018-2019.

<sup>23</sup> Inaugural speech to Parliament (Senate), 5 June 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Government led by Giuseppe Conte (populist government, 2018-2019).

<sup>25</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 26 July 2018.

In the debate, the narrative – again shared from both the center-left and the center-right – related to the need of solidarity and fair share of responsibilities (burden-sharing) between EU Member States has also played a crucial role. As stated in 2011 by the Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni<sup>26</sup>,

a system that leaves the individual coastal states of the southern Mediterranean alone to manage unilaterally or bilaterally such important issues as illegal immigration cannot work [...]. Italy cannot be the only country that carries out [actions] in all Maghreb countries<sup>27</sup>.

Likewise, in its inaugural speech to Parliament in 2016, the Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni (Democratic Party)<sup>28</sup> declared that “we cannot accept a Europe that is too strict on some aspects of its austerity policies and too tolerant towards countries that do not accept to share common responsibilities on immigration issues”<sup>29</sup>. Similar to Maroni and Gentiloni, in 2018 the Prime Minister Conte highlighted that

Europe has allowed selfish closures of many Member States, which have ended up passing on to the border states - and primarily to our country - the burdens and difficulties that should have been shared [...]. Italy cannot be left alone in the face of such challenges [...]. We therefore want to promote a fairer distribution of responsibilities at European level<sup>30</sup>.

This discourse is certainly also linked to the pitfalls of the Dublin Regulation, which have been highlighted by national decision-makers in several occasions.

### **Hungary: Domesticised humanitarianism**

The Hungarian elite has exploited the border position of Hungary to accrue political gains. In order, they have portrayed Hungary as the defender of the European

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<sup>26</sup> Government led by Silvio Berlusconi (center-right, 2008-2011).

<sup>27</sup> Parliamentary intervention, 7 April 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Center-left, 2016 – 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Inaugural speech to Parliament, 13 December 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Inaugural speech to Parliament (Senate and Chamber of Deputies), 5 and 6 June 2018.

civilisation. More recently, “defending Europe despite the West” qualified the anti-immigrant policies and politics. The Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has stated numerous times that Hungary defends not only the Hungarian border, but also the South-eastern border of Europe from the “wandering of the people”, alluding to the Great wandering of the Peoples in ancient times from East to West. To this extent, Orbán alleges that the European “liberal elite” have denied the danger, and foregrounds Hungary, once more, as a nation defending Europe.<sup>31</sup>

This narrative is important to understand the evolution of border management practices in Hungary, particularly in the aftermath of the sudden increase in irregular migrant arrivals in 2015. To reflect on Orbán’s self-assigned role to make Hungary Europe’s defender, Hungary has interpreted the EU border management regime to serve its own priorities and introduced an international protection programme, “Hungary Helps!”, to assist the Middle Eastern Christians that it conceived as an extension of the European self.

Since having joined the EU, Hungary followed a “policy of border securitisation, which essentially entailed a re-nationalisation of its border regime and its framing of the political border as a protective barrier against threats to national and European identity” (Scott 2018, 19; Lamour and Varga 2017). To achieve a borderless zone between Hungary and its neighbouring states with Hungarian minorities has been a political objective for Fidesz governments over years (Scott 2018, 25). The Schengen-enlargement and removal of visa for East European states helped the elite to fulfill this objective. Yet, as the State Secretary for Parliamentary and Strategic Affairs Bálaazs Orbán has indicated, “[Hungarians] do not like borders

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<sup>31</sup> Orbán Viktor sajtónyilatkozata az Európai Tanács rendkívüli ülését követően az M1 Híradónak, October 2016, [Online] Available at: <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-sajtonyilatkozata-az-europai-tanacs-rendkivuli-uleset-kovetoen-az-m1-hiradonak/>



because it has separated them from one and other, but not because others from us” (Orbán foreword in Baudet 2015: 17). The period after 2015, as Scott (2018, pp. 26) notes, how Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz government has exploited borders both “physically and symbolically in ways that resonate with fear of migrants and conservative scepticism of multiculturalism and open borders”. In this very period the Hungarian government appended its politics, policy and narratives of border management to the emergent scepticism with European federalism and multiculturalism apparent amongst the conservative circles in Europe.

In terms of the policies, one can note five key developments namely the border fence patrolled by armed police and military personnel; surveillance mechanisms, the inadmissibility criteria, the blanket rejection of asylum claimants arriving through Serbia; criminalisation of irregular entry and any activity that facilitates protection and reception of migrants; the forcible removal of undocumented asylum seekers apprehended within 8 km of the border fence, commonly known as “8 km” rule, which was later expanded to encompass the whole territory of Hungary; and finally the establishment of “transit-zone” to submit asylum applications along the Hungarian-Serbian border fence (Gyollai and Korkut, 2019). Hence, what started discursively with the securitisation of migration in Hungary brought more fundamental legal and policy changes. Nagy (2016) considered the developments in this period in Hungary as denial, deterrence, obstruction, punishment, lack of solidarity and breaching domestic, European and international law.

To this extent, Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram (2016: 27) alluded the construction of a border fence and transit zones at the border with neighbouring Serbia as well as Croatia after 2015 to an attempt to “fabricate the political through processes of marginalisation and exclusion wherein a number of groups have at best a

tangential relation to the political norm”. The creation of transit zones allowed the Hungarian government to culminate securitisation of mobility and “fix [...] asylum-seekers in time and space and make them invisible to mainstream society” (Scott 2018, 27). This is both a geopolitical and cultural border securitisation according to Scott (2018, 27). Orbán also connoted a European dimension for Hungary’s security-oriented border management practices and blamed the liberal politicians of the EU and as its extension the federalist bureaucrats of the European Commission for uncontrolled migration. As we will discuss looking at emerging narratives below, Orbán made it very clear that Hungary was protecting the European borders and that its actions cannot be considered as against European solidarity. Hungary’s defiance of the refugee resettlement quota has become the most emblematic of migration governance and border management in this period.

Central to the Hungarian border politics has been how to situate Hungary and the Hungarian southern borders to demark the ‘European’ external border. This stance very much originates from the historical position of the Catholic Church against the Ottoman occupiers of the country, who were not only not European, but also Muslim (Pap and Glied 2017). This led to a security and law-enforcement-focused narrative (Brown and Dadu 2018; Szalai, Csornai and Garai 2017). According to this narrative, the country’s location at the external border of the EU, and hence its exposure to irregular migration should require a security-oriented response to migration (Szalai, Csornai and Garai 2017, 22). In this context, the Hungarian Prime Minister appealed both to the Hungarian but the wider European public using such tropes as ‘migration brings dangers’ and that ‘Hungary will not become a nation of migrants’ reinforcing the security and law enforcement narrative demanding a hard European border against irregular arrivals.

Following an identity-oriented narrative (Szalai, Csornai and Garai 2017; Szalai 2017), Orbán also set a demarcation line internally between the internationalist socialist/liberal elite versus people with national consciousness. He designated a ‘pro-migration lobby’ both at home and in Europe in the shape of NGOs and socialist/liberal politicians, and their alleged external supporter George Soros (Gyollai and Korkut 2019). This helped him undermine humanitarianism and human-rights-oriented narrative (Brown and Dadu 2018) demoting the practitioners’ actions as naive and alienated from the threat facing Europe. Hence, his overarching narrative referred not only to the ‘external other’, but also the ‘internal other’. Below, we depict three tropes that Orbán circulated extensively in politics and in the public sphere to underline the humanitarianism/securitisation nexus.

- Hungary defends the European borders:

At any venue possible, Orbán has presented migration as the biggest threat to Europe. He advised the police at their inauguration ceremony: “You are the protectors of our culture, lifestyle and our sovereignty. Our thousand years of statehood without any doubt give [us] the right for defending our borders, our citizens and our culture.”<sup>32</sup> According to Orbán, the new *népvándorlás* or wandering of people would question all that was taken for granted in Europe. He stated:

When we defend our borders, we do not only do something for Hungary, not only protect Hungary’s interests, but the whole, everyone who is behind us, that is, the whole Europe. Those EU member states, which fail to defend the European borders, are the ones that fail to maintain solidarity with the other European Union member states.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Orbán Viktor beszéde a rendőr tiszthelyettesek eskütételén, September 2015, [Online] Available at: <http://www.miniszerelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-a-rendor-tiszthelyettesek-eskutetelen-2/>

<sup>33</sup> Orbán Viktor sajtónyilatkozata az Európai Tanács rendkívüli ülését követően az M1 Híradónak, October 2016, [Online] Available at: <http://www.miniszerelnok.hu/orban-viktor-sajtonyilatkozata-az-europai-tanacs-rendkivuli-uleset-kovetoen-az-m1-hiradonak/>

Orbán's politicisation of the European quota regime and its solidarity component presented domesticised humanitarianism most contentiously. In 2015 the interior ministers at the European Council agreed to the Commission's proposal to relocate 120,000 refugees despite Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic remaining defiant. The majority voting did not ensure their compliance and in return the Commission instituted infringement procedures in June 2017 for their failure to take "the necessary action" under the 2015 plan (European Commission 2017 in Murray and Longo 2018, 414). Despite the EU's search for solidarity for burden sharing across the EU member states, Orbán promoted his own understanding of solidarity. This was taking on the responsibility to protect European external border but not the solidarity of the EU quota regime, given its aimed relocation of refugees across the EU member states in an equitable manner. Hence, humanitarianism was not with those in need but for the European publics allegedly threatened with irregular migrants reflecting a security-oriented rather than humanitarianism-oriented solidarity. To seek an audience for its anti-migration narrative, Hungary held a referendum in 2016 on the EU's proposed distribution of refugees among EU states. Challenging the Commission, the government asked Hungarian voters if they wanted the Hungarian government to abide by "the mandatory relocation of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary without the approval of the Hungarian parliament". Orbán also assumed that the quota referendum in Hungary would have meant a major breakthrough for the anti-migration voice in Europe.

We oppose the politically correct migration policy and have decided to stand by the defence of [our] borders. [...] We, Hungarians, are one of the committed countries with the European Union. Our commitment to European common future is stronger than ever. This is the very reason why we want to change [the quota system] to defend Europe, which we all love, feel ourselves at home, for which we gave sacrifices.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Magyarország az otthonunk, meg kell védenünk!, September 2016, [Online] Available at: <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/magyarorszag-az-otthonunk-meg-kell-vedenunk/>

Although the referendum did not pass, the government intention remained and was furthered by key policy changes.

- We do not want to become a nation of migrants:

Orbán endorsed the conservative and radical right assumption that the multiculturalism and internationalism European socialist/liberal projects. Henceforth, Orbán depicted humanitarian stance that seeks to protect the other as a threat to European security (Gyollai and Korkut 2019). At the Future of Europe at the Visegrad 4 conference in January 2018, he stated:

Although in Central Europe, we can talk about migration as a phenomenon emerging after 2015, its positive depiction, support, its evolution into a European item has started long before 2015. This has started not with *willkommenskultur*, but when the United Nations General Secretary gave a presentation at the European Parliament to recommend Europe that migrants will need Europe and Europe will need migrants. Europe should leave its prejudices behind about migration, it needs to open up channels for migrants, and that migration is a solution not a problem. Yet, we do not want to become a nation of migrants. We do not want to see what the migrant communities of Western Europe bring: terror, public insecurities, the feeling of safety and comfort of being at home that the native nations would feel at the face of migration.<sup>35</sup>

Standing to protect the self from the other, Orbán alleged that an international lobby, composing not only the European Commission but also the United Nations, and NGOs as the domestic accomplices of the international lobby were at odds with how the ‘natives’ would prefer to run their affairs. This humanitarian narrative, he implied, was prone to unleash insecurities for the self (Gyollai and Korkut 2019).

- International migration lobby and its domestic partners are against us:

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<sup>35</sup> Orbán Viktor előadása az „Európa jövője” című V4-konferencián, January 2018 [Online] Available at, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-az-europa-jovoje-cimu-v4-konferencian/>

Subsequently, the European Parliament triggered infringement procedures against Hungary for its breach of democratic values with the launch of the so-called Article 7 sanction mechanism in September 2018. In its aftermath, the Hungarian government instigated a new campaign with a “necessary and effective way to get the government’s message across to the Hungarian people”, said Zoltán Kovács, the Prime Minister’s spokesman.<sup>36</sup> The Sargentini report voted at the European Parliament in September 2018, concluded that the Hungarian government’s clampdowns on judicial independence, freedom of expression, minority rights and NGO activities constituted a “systemic risk” to the bloc’s fundamental values. Still, Orbán has depicted the Article 7 process as an act of revenge by the European elite intent on punishing Hungary for its vehement opposition to migration and refusal to accept an EU scheme to share refugees.<sup>37</sup>

The European elite declared bankruptcy, and the symbol of this bankruptcy is the European Commission. [...] The good news is that the days of the European Commission is numbered. [...] Because they have rejected their roots, and instead of Christian Europe they looked for building a Europe of open society. [...] In Europe of open society, there are no borders. The European people can be exchanged with migrants. [...] The nation, the national identity and national feeling are negative and considered as dying, and the state does not guarantee security in Europe.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, the security-oriented narrative should not mean that humanitarianism has been fully ignored by the Hungarian politicians. The Hungarian leaders sought to create an image of their country as a “protector” of Europe and Middle Eastern Christians despite detaining asylum seekers in containers at transit zones. Within Europe, they argued, European Christians needed protection while outside Europe, the

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<sup>36</sup> It is appalling to listen to Sargentini’s absurdities, September 2018 [Online] Available at: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/government-spokesperson/news/sargentini-report-zoltan-kovacs-tells-bbc-it-is-appalling-to-listen-to-sargentini-s-absurdities>

<sup>37</sup> EU Parliament votes to trigger Article 7 sanctions procedure against Hungary – DW, September 2018, Available online at: <https://www.unian.info/world/10257936-eu-parliament-votes-to-trigger-article-7-sanctions-procedure-against-hungary-dw.html>

<sup>38</sup> Orbán Viktor beszéde a XXIX. Bálványosi Nyári Szabadegyetem és Diáktáborban, July 2018, Available online at: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-xxix-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban>

Middle Eastern Christians needed humanitarianism the most. To depict a protector image, Hungary has started the “Hungary Helps!” program in 2017 to support persecuted Christians. The pillars of the program, according to the state secretary in charge Azbej Tristan, were immediate action and sincerity. He stated “Hungary is unashamedly proud of its Christian cultural foundations and it builds its national and foreign policy following these foundations.” “To avoid the mistake that many international aid organisations has made”, the Hungarian government did not decide on anyone’s behalf, but instead went to the Middle East to see how they can help those in need.<sup>39</sup> This showed the Hungarian government’s attempts to foster a domestic self at home and wider Europe and an extension of the self in the shape of the Middle Eastern Christian. The Hungarian, European, and their extension needed protection not the irregular migrant. Still this humanitarianism implied both the Middle Eastern Christian and the Muslim migrant were to be kept at bay: the Christians in their homelands in the Middle East and the other at detention zones.

### **Conclusion:**

In this article, we concentrated on humanitarian- and security-oriented aspects of migration politics. Our two cases present two different mechanisms of political communication. Essentially, in Italy references to concrete policy measures are more conspicuous than they are in Hungary. In Italy, the dominant narratives have revolved around the need to save migrants' lives and protect their human rights (humanitarianism) and to combat illegal immigration, smuggling of migrants, and terrorism (securitisation). These narratives have gone hand in hand, showing the crucial role played by the humanitarian/securitisation nexus that lies behind the

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<sup>39</sup> (Available at <https://888.hu/article-igy-segit-magyarorszag-a-kozel-keleti-keresztényeken>)

development of the overall Italian strategy. Moreover, the evidence shows that Italian decision-makers – from both the center-left and the center-right – have emphasised the necessity to establish a fair distribution of responsibilities between the EU Member States in tackling migration flows (solidarity), as well as the need to establish cooperation with North African countries (externalisation). In Hungary, there is an ideational making of migration politics aligned with securitisation-oriented policy mechanisms for border controls. The protection mechanism for Hungary is extra-territorial and selective, that is, helping the Middle Eastern Christians in situ and in their original homelands. Or else, it is for the native Europeans whose rights should be defended from migration flows.

Conversely, concerning irregular migrants arriving to Hungary through the southern borders, the government has adopted a security-oriented stance. In justifying the newly implemented border control measures, the government discursively operationalised religion, and Hungary's historical past and freedom fighting traditions in order to facilitate the positive public acceptance of its political agenda. The dehumanisation of migrants, their discursive representation as threat to Hungary's religious and national identity and territorial integrity foregrounded national security objectives, and simultaneously marginalised humanitarian concerns with the aim to invalidate sentiments of solidarity. The analogous interpretation and presentation of past and present events served to overcome and resolve the cognitive dissonance of shutting the borders and deny support to tens of thousands of asylum seekers.

Yet, what appears with respect to political communication is humanitarian/securitisation nexus set the terms of migration and human rights debate. In this debate, references to both institutional and narrative-oriented pillars of migration politics mattered to an extent the politicians discursively made first what is



fair protection, second whose rights should be protected, and third who should European societies collaborate with to make sure that they themselves are protected. To this extent, our article has proposed a review of Italian and Hungarian political languages to represent the making of migration governance in two EU border states. Considering the difference in their respective length of EU membership, we show that the formulation of references change such as to institutions in the Italian case and a meta narrative in the Hungarian case. Yet, notwithstanding their differences, our article also showed that political communication operates to foreground the human rights of the self, the extended self, or the other as long as they meet the demands of the self. This imposes conditions on the rights of the other that is in most need of guarantees, such as the migrant.

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